

**A History of Dykeman's Store
at Lower Jemseg**

1904 - 2007

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After one hundred and two years in business Dykeman's Store at Lower Jemseg has closed. This has caused sorrow, nostalgia, regret, and inconvenience, and triggered a host of memories for those to whom it was a touchstone that had been in their lives "forever". It is a fact of life that commercial establishments have a finite life span, and while family businesses have a somewhat better record of continuity, even they fall victim to time and change.

Back in 1904 when Medley Dykeman began store keeping, he was a married man of thirty-one with a wife, Estella, and a young family of two. His second son, A. Stanley, was born shortly after on January 10, 1905. Captain Dykeman had worked on the riverboats for a few years, but now recognized a need in his own community. At that time a village store was a necessity for country dwellers, and while there had been earlier stores at "Mouth of Jemseg" as it was called then, it was time for another one.

Medley Dykeman, like all country storekeepers of his day, tried to supply the wants of his customers as far as possible. That meant besides stocking staples like flour, tea, sugar, salt and molasses that came from Saint John on "the Boat" on a regular basis, he would fill your own one gallon oil can with kerosene to keep your lamps burning. He kept hardware, bolts of cotton, patent medicines, ink, matches, lanterns, gum rubbers, tobacco, thread, rope, tea pots, post cards, slate pencils, stove pipe, ammunition, horse shoe nails, axe handles, whet stones and all manner of other goods that farm families might need. Furthermore he would order things for you to come up on "the Boat".

People reminiscing about the Country Store recall the cheese bell with its great half moons of sharp orange cheddar from a local cheese factory. They remember with awe the huge McCaskey cash register with its filing system where almost everyone in the village had a charge account. Barter was an integral part of the system. Old accounts show local farmers bringing eggs, butter, smoked fish, bags of oats, and even wool socks and double knit grey wool mittens for credit. Then they used their credit to buy things like sugar for 2¢ a pound, tea for 16¢, molasses for 22¢ a gallon and "1 pair of shoepacks" for a dollar. Surplus goods like the eggs, butter, oats and smoked fish ultimately found their way to markets in Saint John on boats named *David Weston*, *May Queen* or *Majestic* that brought the merchant new stock on their return trip.

These river boats were vital to country merchants and farmers all along the river and lakes, and it was a river boat called the *Dream* that almost put an end to Dykeman's store eighty-five years ago. On a windy fall day in October, 1922, Mr. and Mrs. Medley Dykeman, with Mrs. Dykeman's sister Albina and her husband, Jefferson Dykeman, were going on a trip to Saint John. No doubt the store keeper was planning to settle accounts with his suppliers and arrange to replenish his stock for the coming winter. The others were almost certainly looking forward to a visit to Saint John for a trip to town only happened once or twice a year then. So according to plan they boarded the *Dream* at the wharf, but when she encountered rough weather on the Long Reach she capsized and sank. Medley and 'Stella Dykeman, her sister Albina and two other passengers were drowned, while Jeff Dykeman, a strong swimmer, made it to shore.

This disaster was a dreadful blow to the whole community. It was especially devastating to the young Dykemans at the Store where the baby, Vernon, was only four and a half years old. But the Dykemans were, and still are, tough and resilient; the stubborn strength that has come down from their Loyalist ancestors sustains them and helps them survive.

Following the tragedy Charles and Sarah Dykeman, 'Stella's elderly parents, lived with the family, and it was young seventeen year old Stanley who took over as store keeper and merchant. This was very difficult but he had learned well from his father. Most (not all) people were kind, and perseverance won out. He followed in his father's footsteps and worked to meet the needs of his community. In 1928 he married Freda Ebbett from Lower Gagetown who became a wonderful helpmate to him and also served as Post Mistress for a number of years.

During Stan Dykeman's life the store business changed a lot. Even during the 1930s boat traffic was being replaced by trucks, and after the war the boats vanished altogether. Peoples' needs changed too; with the advent of iceboxes, a thriving ice business to supply ice year round was started, with ice being cut from the river in winter, then stored deep in sawdust for summer use. Now flour barrels, molasses kegs and kerosene drums disappeared, and bread trucks from Lanes and Eastern Bakeries called once or twice a week because mothers no longer baked every day. Farmers, from the thirties on, did not grow all the feed they needed for their livestock, so now the store began to supply dairy ration for the cattle, oats for horses, hog grower, and scratch feed for the chickens.

But *A.S. Dykeman*, and from the mid-sixties *A.S. Dykeman & Son*, continued to serve their customers. With refrigeration fresh meat could be kept, and because many people did not have cows any more, milk and cream came in bottles from the dairy. Other changes in country life and transportation occurred making things even more difficult for country merchants everywhere. Farms changed and disappeared, local people more often worked in the city, and a passenger car in every driveway meant trips to town once or twice a week rather than once or twice a year. Supermarkets appeared in the 1950s and over the next four decades wormed their way into country dwellers' existence. By the time Stan's son, Ronnie, became the store owner in the eighties, the country store was no longer all things to all people. In fact it became a place to pick up staples like milk and bread and sometimes produce in season.

Through all the changes Stan Dykeman mostly enjoyed store keeping, even after he had "retired". He became a purveyor of information, and a fine source of local history and stories. Even though one riverboat had taken so much from him, he cherished memories of the days when steamers plied their course from wharf to wharf to collect produce or put off freight. His collection of riverboat pictures graced the walls of the store, along with many other mementoes of times past. We lost a treasure trove of knowledge when he left us in 1996 at a ripe age of ninety-one.

After Stan's passing, his son, Ronald Dykeman, was the remaining storekeeper and general merchant at Lower Jemseg. With many sidelines and services he kept the store going by keeping longer hours and making a real effort to supply what customers asked for. By now the business was surviving rather than thriving, and even Ron himself, before his too-early demise in 2004, believed it might have outlived its usefulness.

So now it's gone. We'll find another place to buy horse feed and life will go on, but an important icon has passed from our ken. For those of us who knew it, it will remain a treasured memory of some wonderful people and a vibrant community lifestyle that has vanished. But we will "remember with tears and remember for years".

J. Medley Dykeman

A. Stanley Dykeman

Ronald S. Dykeman

b. April 10, 1873

b. January 10, 1905

b. April 4, 1947

d. October 20, 1922

d. November 3, 1996

d. December 11, 2004